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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-08-1169T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Aviation, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Despite a recent reduction in air traffic due to economic factors, congestion on airport runways remains a safety concern. The nation's aviation system is still expected to grow and become more crowded in the coming years, exacerbating concerns about ground safety issues, including runway incursions, which occur when aircraft enter runways without authorization. This statement addresses (1) recent trends in runway incursions, (2) steps taken to improve runway safety, and (3) what more could be done. This statement is based on GAO's November 2007 report issued to this Subcommittee on runway safety. GAO's work on that report included surveying experts on the causes of runway incidents and accidents and the effectiveness of measures to address them, reviewing safety data, and interviewing agency and industry officials. This statement also contains information from FAA on recent incursions and actions taken since November 2007.

What GAO Recommends

In prior work, GAO recommended that FAA take several measures to enhance runway safety, such as updating its national runway safety plan, collecting more complete data on runway incidents, and addressing air traffic controller fatigue. The agency is taking actions to implement them.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-1169T](#). For more information, contact Gerald L. Dillingham, Ph.D., at (202) 512-2834.

AVIATION SAFETY

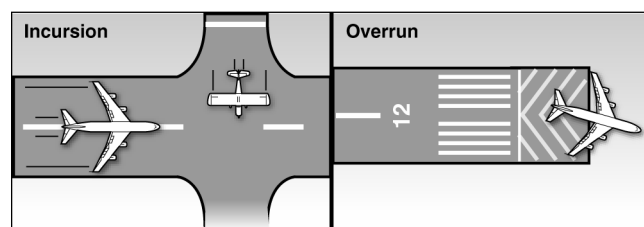
FAA Has Increased Efforts to Address Runway Incursions

What GAO Found

While the number of serious incursions this fiscal year is slightly lower than last year, the rate (measured by the number of incidents per 1 million takeoffs and landings) has increased. The number of serious runway incursions—incidents in which collisions were narrowly or barely avoided—decreased from 24 in fiscal year 2007 to 23 in fiscal year 2008 through September 16, 2008. The rate of serious incursions increased by 5 percent during fiscal year 2008 through September 16, 2008, compared with fiscal year 2007. For all categories of severity, the total number and rate of incursions increased at a slightly slower pace during fiscal year 2008, compared with the prior year. The total number of incursions during the first three quarters of fiscal year 2008 increased by 7 percent and the rate increased by 10 percent, compared with the same period during fiscal year 2007.

During fiscal year 2008, FAA has given higher priority to improving runway safety than it did during the previous 2 years when it did not have a permanent director for its Office of Runway Safety, which it created to lead and coordinate the agency's runway safety efforts. FAA's recent actions to improve runway safety include continuing to deploy and test new technology designed to prevent runway collisions; promoting changes in airport layout, markings, signage, and lighting; and issuing new air traffic procedures.

FAA could further improve runway safety by ensuring the timely deployment of technology, encouraging the development of new technology, and increasing its focus on human factors issues, which aviation safety experts identified as the primary cause of incursions. For example, experts said that technology such as the FAA's planned installation of runway status lights at 22 major airports and the development of an incursion warning system in the cockpit are promising technologies and that increased training for pilots and air traffic controllers could help address human factors issues.



Source: Lincoln Laboratory, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and GAO.